

## Who Will They See

(Ref. They Saw No One But Jesus, CHUP 2/25/01)

Mark 9:2-23; II Corinthians 4:3-6

February 7, 2016

Pastor Dave Carver

My hunch is that on most Sundays, you come to church without knowing what scripture will be the focus for our morning worship. I bet that usually when you get up and get dressed, you don't know what I'm going to preach about.

There are, however, some days in the life of the church when you know what you're going to hear before you arrive at church. What are some of the days when you know what the Bible Story is going to be? Christmas, Easter, Pentecost – these are all days when you can more or less predict the narrative that will be the center of our worship, right?

Why do we do that? Why do we tell the same stories over and over again? Is there anyone here who does not know about the Baby Jesus born in a barn? Is there anyone here who does not know about the empty tomb? Maybe one or two. But mostly, when our family of faith tells the same story again and again, it's not so much because we're wondering how the story turns out, but because the story reminds us who we are in the world.



<sup>1</sup>Today is one of those days...but I bet not everyone was aware of that. This is a festival day in the Christian church – a day called The Transfiguration of the Lord. From ancient times, the church of Jesus Christ has set aside a day on which to celebrate the fact that Jesus is the one who fulfills the Law given by Moses and the one who was dreamed of by prophets such as Elijah. This day,

---

<sup>1</sup> *Transfiguration*, Titian (1560)

this last Sunday prior to Ash Wednesday, is appropriate because according to the Gospels, it is at this time that Jesus revealed the fact that his earthly journey would not end in earthly triumph, but in death. After the events described in today's Gospel, Jesus' attention shifts from his public ministry to preparing for his passion and death.

What does the story say? What happens? Well, Jesus has just begun to teach his disciples that he must suffer and die at the hands of the elders and priests and scribes, and in the midst of this, he takes Peter, James, and John on a little retreat. They go up the mountain by themselves, and all of a sudden, Jesus is changed. He's still himself, all right. They recognize him, they speak to him – but his face and his clothing are changed. They are shining like the sun. And then Moses, the giver of the Law, and Elijah, the most important of the prophets, appear on the scene. Peter attempts a bit of conversation, but then a thunderous voice interrupts him and, reminiscent of Jesus' baptism, thunders "This is my Son, whom I love." And then, in a bit of instruction to the disciples that is very different than the baptism, the voice continues: "Listen to him!"

When it's all said and done, the disciples look up and see no one but Jesus. And on their way home from the retreat, Jesus says, "Look, don't mention this to anyone until after I've been raised from the dead." And the discussion continues on from there.

It is a somewhat fantastic story, isn't it? It is totally out of our experience, but Matthew, Mark, and Luke all have it in their gospels. When they got around to telling the story of the Jesus that they knew, all three of these men thought that this was a pivotal event in the life of Jesus as well as the disciples. Why?



<sup>2</sup>Well, there are several reasons, but this morning I'd like to consider two. First, the fact that Jesus appears with Moses and Elijah demonstrates that he is the completeness of the story. Moses was the first great leader of Israel. He represents the Law, the framework for living that was given by God. In Deuteronomy, Moses tells the people that “the Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me” – in other words, a teacher, a leader, one who will stand between the people and God in ways that not even Moses did. The presence of Moses on the mountain with Jesus indicates that Jesus is that prophet and that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Law. Jesus is the one to whom all of those rules and regulations pointed. Jesus of Nazareth is perfection, and Moses acknowledges him as such.

And Elijah was widely thought of as the chief prophet in Judaism. His presence on the mountain is evidence that Jesus is the one to whom Elijah and all of his colleagues were pointing. There is no need for further prophecy concerning a savior, because here he is!

So to Mark's readers, the first item of significance is that Jesus is the completion of the Law and the Prophets. The transfiguration – the ways that Jesus' very bodily appearance was changed, and accompanied by the two historical figures – is a demonstration that this is not a new idea, but rather, the ultimate stage in God's purposes in saving his people.

The second level of significance can be found in the additional phrase uttered by the heavenly voice. When Jesus was baptized, the voice thundered “You are my Son,

---

<sup>2</sup> *The Transfiguration*, Lodovico Carracci 1594

whom I love; with you I am well-pleased.” My usual rule of thumb is that when you hear a voice from heaven, every syllable matters. So when this phrase is essentially repeated at the transfiguration – only directed to the disciples, rather than to Jesus himself, and then followed with “Listen to him!”, well, then, I think that it’s worth noting. Why?

Because the disciples aren’t that different from you and me. It’s easy to get swept away in the pursuit of some mystical experience. When we have some sort of “mountaintop experience”, we want to linger there. We want to stay in the warmth of the moment. This command from heaven demonstrates that although these experiences are valuable and important, they must lead us to obedience. Almost always in scripture the *word* has priority over the *vision*. That is, our feelings are important, but what is more important is seeking to understand God’s will. One writer put it this way: “Seeing Jesus transfigured has value only if it leads the disciples to listen obediently to his divinely authorized teaching.”<sup>3</sup>

This is all very interesting, pastor, but why are we reading this story again? Why do we need to hear it time and time again, like the Easter or Christmas or Pentecost stories?

In the story, who, or what, was transfigured? Jesus, right? Specifically, his Body. It changed. It was different. Jesus and the boys went up the mountain and right there in front of their eyes, Jesus’ body was transfigured. His everyday, walking to the temple, teaching the crowds, having lunch, playing tag with the kids, soon-to-be-hung-on-a-

---

<sup>3</sup> Douglas Hare, *Interpretation Commentary on Matthew*, p. 200.

Roman-cross body – it was transfigured. It was re-defined by the power of God. The disciples saw that body change.



Where is Jesus' body now? That's right. It's here. You're looking at it. The church – we are called time and time again *the body of Christ*. We are the ones who behold Christ at work in the world. We portray him. We indicate his activity. We are his hands and his feet, right?

That's what Paul was trying to help his friends in Corinth grasp – that God calls to the faithful and says, "I have changed you! I have called you! You are a light to the world." Who is the light – Jesus? Yes, of course. The church? Yes – for we are the Body of Christ – we are the light of the Lord.

I came across a story some years ago that was simple, yet fantastic. It seems as though there was a group of Christians who felt the Lord calling them to go into the heart of some distant country and proclaim the forgiving love of Jesus. They stumbled into a remote village, where they asked if anyone had ever heard of the man called Jesus. "No" was the quick answer. So the Christians began to tell stories from the gospel – stories about a man who walked with the poor and who preached good news to them. They told of healings and of the time that Jesus fed the multitude. And as these Christians told their story, smiles of recognition flashed across the faces of their hearers. Finally, one of the villagers interrupted. "We know the man, we know the man!", he said. "He's been here!"

The travelers looked at one another, and their leader said, "That's impossible. Jesus lived and died a long time ago." But the villagers persisted: "No! He was here! We've

met him! And we love him!” And they went on to describe a missionary doctor who had visited that area many years before. He was loving, patient, and kind. He gave of his food to those who had none. He had instruments of healing. And he had told them of God’s love.

You know what happened, don’t you? This particular village was not “unreached”. It had been reached by a man many years ago. But the residents of that village didn’t see a missionary doctor. They saw no one but Jesus.

Beloved, who do people see when you walk into the room? Who do people see when you stand up to give a report, or when you pack lunches for your children in the morning, or when you kiss your wife goodnight? Who do people see when they ask you for assistance, or when they don’t ask you for the assistance that you know they need?

You are the body of Christ. The reason that we tell and re-tell the story of the day that Jesus’ body was transfigured on the mountain is not that once upon a time Jesus took a temporary vacation from reality. No – it’s to remind us that we, too, are called to be transformed every day. Just as the glory of God shone through the face of Jesus, so too can the power of God shine through your life and mine.

Come Wednesday, we’ll begin the season of Lent. Please, please, please – join me in a season of prayer and reflection – and one of action – in which we will discover what it means to fully live as Jesus would have us live. Take advantage of the opportunities for growth that are offered to you this season. Fall in love with Jesus. Re-arrange your lives so that you have time for prayer and study and fasting and feasting. Learn what it means to be the body of Christ in this place and at this time.

The reason we listen to this story is because we are bold enough to hope that one day, people will look at us, and at the things we do, and they won't see Pastor Dave or Kati or Bill or Lauren. If we get it right, they'll look at us, but they won't see anyone but Jesus. May it be so, Lord, may it be so. Amen.